chapter 2

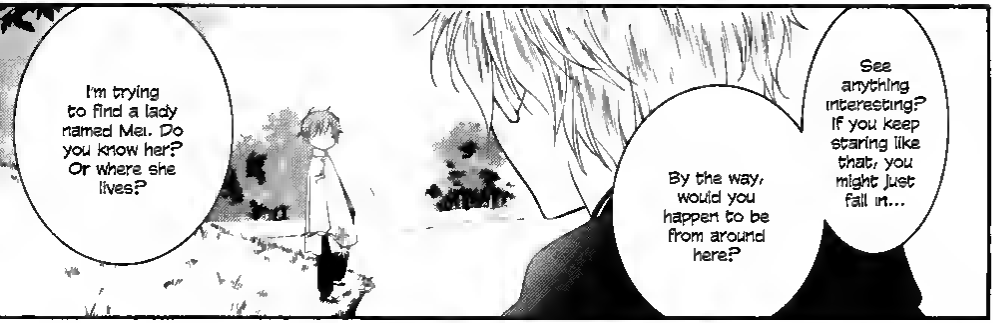
The ReAective Lake

Spirited away?
What does that mean, Mister Rem?
Well
That's what it's called when people vanish for no reason, Kukuru
?
It's a local legend.
...Actually, it just started up a couple years back.
Some days you'll look into the lake and you could almost swear it's a giant mirror. When it gets like that, you know somebody's about to go missing.
For a while, anyhow. They almost always come back before long, so you might as well say they got a little lost, instead.
It only happens to children, too. Figured I should bring it up just to be on the safe side.
Since you're headed over to Mirror Lake, yourselves.
Yourn the little one, there.
Thing of it is, the ones who go missing are never quite the same once they come back, so folks started saying they'd been "spirited away," and the name stuck.

Do you, now? Then how about you get this for the little one, eh?
Hm...
Spiritings...
...Interesting.
You seem to know your stuff, too, for a young'un. That's some fine material you've got there.
...I just darn things, actually.
Sometimes I tailor clothes when I find a material I like, though.
She might be young yet, but you won't find a better dyer than our Mel. She and her little boy live right there on the lake.
She swears up and down that nothing makes the colors pop the way the water there does. That's why she'll never leave, even though she's got her boy to worry about.
You should buy some of this too
How do you like this? Almost as cute as you
She should be just finishing up with her last batch of orders, so I'm sure she'll have plenty of samples for you to look over.
What are you doing?
Ah, well. They just seem... kinda different, that's all. Hard to explain.
Tend to get lost more than usual, for one.
And...
.. You said they start acting strange. How so?
Hm?

Ooh, wow!
Isn't it pretty Mister Rem?
The water's glittering!
...Not quite what I'd call a mirror though
Now to find the dyer's house and...
Let's see...
Yay!
Hey no running
..Hm?

...Hello.
!


I'm trying to find a lady named Mei. Do you know her? Or where she lives?
By the way, would you happen to be from around here?
See anything interesting? If you keep staring like that, you might just fall in...

What?
..I mean... this way?
um...
!
That way.

Rai!
Where have you been?!
I was just...
...picking flowers.
Sweetie, these are from the hill behind the house...
Why are you coming back from the lake? Did you get lost again?
Don't make me worry about you so much...
Okay?
Now don't disappear on me like that again, you understand?
O...kay?
I turned my back for a second, and you were gone. I looked everywhere for...!
Can I...
...help you...?
Hello. Are you Mei?
I-I am, yes.

We were sent by the old man at the clothier.
I'm Rem, and this is Kukuru, my companion. It's a pleasure to meet you.
H-Hello!
We were hoping to see some samples of your work.
Ah, the clothier...
Of course. You're welcome to take a look.
We were just about to sit down for tea. Won't you join us?
May we? I'd hate to be a bother.
Not at all. Please, right this way.
Rai, go on and open the door for our guests.
ガタン!
THNK
.....
ガタ
ガタ
ガタ
Oh, he's so silly...
The door opens to the left, remember?
.....
ガタ
It won't open if you pull it to the right.

Rai, could you bring out the tray for me, please?
The black square one.
My goodness! There's so much to see!
You've got that right.
Make yourselves right at home.
...Here.
We always put the trays here when we're done with them. Did you forget?
TMP
とっ

Now, don't sulk.
Oh, no, I'm not mad at you.
Just remember for next time, okay?
Ahhh...
...Rai?
Here's something that might cheer you up!
We're having steamed buns to go with our tea today. Your favorite! Doesn't that sound yummy?
The ones I made last month for your birthday, remember?
...The potato and chestnut ones?
That's right!
...You had some on your cheek, too...
Some of the potato paste got stuck to your forehead, remember?
Well! If I did, it was only because you put it there!

...Mister Rem.
Hm?
You're going to do something mean again, aren't you?
Huh?
.....

...Whaaat?
...What in the world makes you say that?
Well... you seem to be enjoying yourself, for whatever reason.
Yeesh! What a rude thing to say...
You only ever look that happy when you're about to pick on someone.

...Stop it. You're imagining things.
Go on, get outta here.
Play with someone your own size for once, why don't you?
Oh. You're going back outside? Already?
Are you sure you don't want to wait until the bread is done steaming?
We wanna play!
Why, certainly!
Not that I can eat any...
smile
You wanna...
Go play...
...until snack time?
smile
...Stay away from the lake, okay?
Do you hear me?
Yeees.
Of course!

Huh..?
...Oh, sorry. I assumed that you hear that all the time...
He looks just like you.
Oh...
...You and your boy...
...seem very similar.
びくっ
JERK
...Oh, no.
He takes more after my late husband, really.
...He might have gotten his mole and his lack of direction from me, but I'd say that's about it.

Like it's been covered by a sheet of ice.
...Of course.
You could almost mistake it for a mirror, sometimes.
Oh, not that one.
There's another one, now. More recent.
Apparently children have been going missing, only to turn up out of nowhere...
...Like they were spirited away.
Ah, so he gets lost easily. I see.
You know, that reminds me... You people have some interesting stories about that lake out front.
JUMP
Are you familiar with them?
...I heard from the old clothier...
...that the child who returns is never quite the same as the one who disappeared.
Exactly how is up for debate. But for whatever reason, they all seem to share a newfound propensity for getting lost.
....So tell me, Miss Mei.

Your boy, Rai...
When was he spirited away?
Let's see...
Hrm...
...Oh dear. That's not right...?

That...
...goes there.
Oh!
You're very good at this, Rai.
My mom...
teaches me stuff.
Lots and lots of stuff.
herbal remedies
Like what plants to use if you get hurt,
and flowers to eat if your tummy aches.
Oh, how nice. Mothers certainly seem to know everything!
She's good at making pretty cloth and yummy snacks, too.
But she's scary when she's mad.
Well, you could say it's a mother's job to get angry, sometimes.
It only means she loves you.
...But she doesn't...
...get mad at me anymore.
...It's like...

My mom...
...isn't really my mom.
...You've known, haven't you?
You felt that there was something different about him, but you weren't sure what.
Your intuition's not bad.

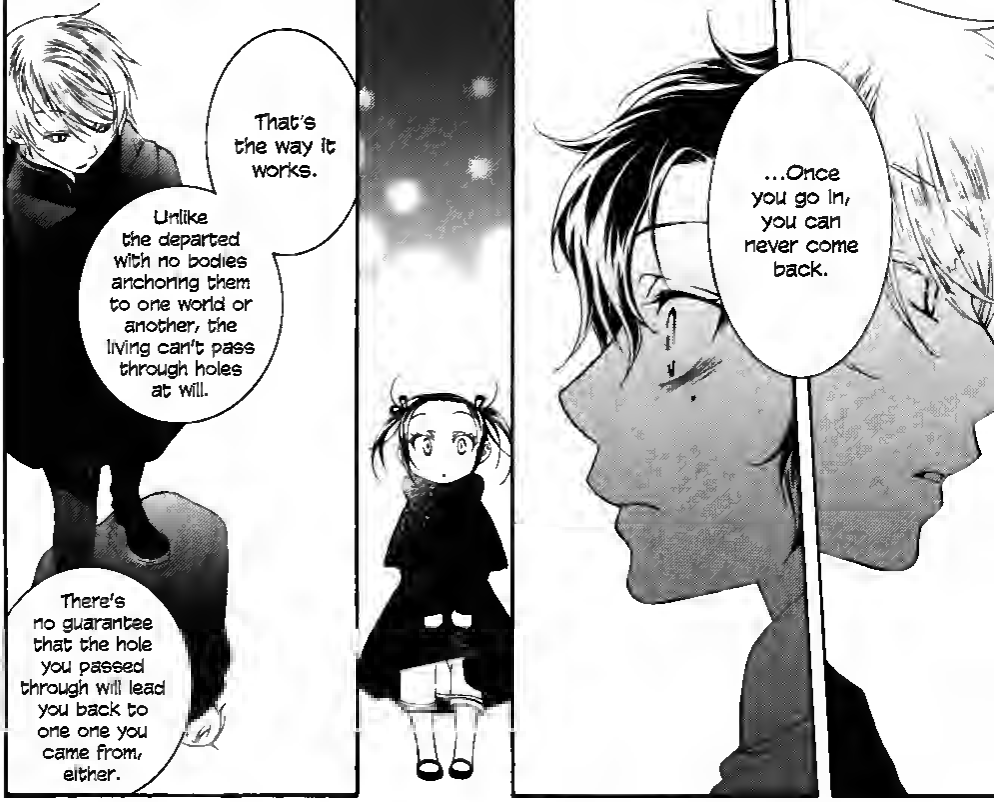
But your mind isn't playing tricks on you. He really has changed.
What's changed? His dominant hand? The placement of his mole?
KYAT
Stop it!
What are you telling me..?!
That's ridiculous!
There's nothing wrong with him! He hasn't changed!
...It was only recently, wasn't it?
One part of you wants to believe there's nothing wrong. But the other has doubts.
But the truth is, he...
No..!
TYK

...not my mom?
...I knew it.
Ra-
It-it's not what you think. We were just...
...just...
So you're...
So you knew it, too.
You really do take after your mother.
...Would you like to know the truth, then?
Ah, I see.

...There are countless worlds that exist apart from our own.
Sometimes the fabric between the worlds tears apart, joining one world to another. My job is to mend it when it does.
At times the lake looks just like a mirror, so the story goes.
That's when the Spiritings happen.
Oh, my.
The lake... It's different?
Here, you know the hole is present when the lake looks just like a mirror.
The tricky thing about holes is that they vanish and reappear at random. Normally there's no way to tell, but here it's different.
What!?
...Oh!

You're standing...
on the water...?
...Come on, it's safe.
I...Ice?
On a warm day like today?
Oh, my goodness. It really is like a mirror!
?

...Miss Mei.
It's warm...?
Turn
Mm... Now, where...
!
Look, here. Do you see it?
There's a tiny hole here, just big enough for a child to slip through.
You'll find that your real son is on the other side.
I can make it wider for you, if you'd like to go inside and look for him.
Unfortunately, however...


That's the way it works.
Unlike the departed with no bodies anchoring them to one world or another, the living can't pass through holes at will.
There's no guarantee that the hole you passed through will lead you back to one one you came from, either.
...Once you go in, you can never come back.

Including him, of course.
In all honesty, I should close the hole here and now and be done with it.
But if you want to go inside, I'll wait. I'll wait until you're ready to leave everything here behind.
So what will it be?
You'll never know what you're stepping into until you're on the other side.
No one's forcing you to go.

...You're too sensitive to one another, that's the problem.
Otherwise, you might have gone your entire lives without knowing.
A little time will heal all of your unease.
It's not too late. You can still forget everything I've said.

If you stay here... You'll never be without, at least.
I know people who can take you in, give you a good life.
...I'm sorry.
That's why this is the best place for you to be.
This is what's *best* for you.
But...

I'll never abandon him. When I go, he goes with me!
But this boy is still my son.
There has to be a reason he's two people now - him and his brother on the other side. I know that much.
I'm sorry.
I know it's safer for you here, but I'll protect you wherever we go.
I promise.
Will you come with Mom?

I'll go ahead and widen the hole.
...As you wish.
Right this way.
...Last chance. Are you sure?
No!

...Well, you can't both go down at once.
I stretched it out, but it'll still be a tight fit.
We'll start with you Miss Mei. Rai, with me please.
Smile
I can't be...
.....
...You're right.
There's no reflection just in this one spot... It's so dark.
I'm sorry but, ah...
This hole... really isn't small at all is it?
Rai and I could easily go down

……!
—er…?
YANK
AHHH!!
Sorry. I lied.
Nh-What's happening?! My hand! Something's got my-!
He stays, you go.
Mom!
……!
What?

...he has no choice but to stay here, the rest of his life.
No...!
I'm sorry, didn't I say? Living people can't travel between worlds.
And if they do pass through, there's no way back... The same applies to the other side.
...That sleeve...
Isn't that Mister Rem's...?
But that's his left hand...
Strange.
He came here from the other side. And that means...
No! You lied to me!
Mom!
I told him I wouldn't abandon him! Why would you do this to us?!
...I wanted to see how far your resolve would take you.
I needed to know whether you'd leave this child behind for your real son or if you'd raise him as your own...
And if that's what you want...
You resolved to make both of your children happy.
...But you chose both.

Rai...!
...Then who am I not to help?
YANK
!?

O....www.
AHHH!
What in the...?
Oof!
Sir Suit

...And that takes care of that.
Good!
...Wha?
But...
? ? ?
klap klap
.....?
I...I was dragged through, wasn't I...? So why...?
...Why am I back?
tug

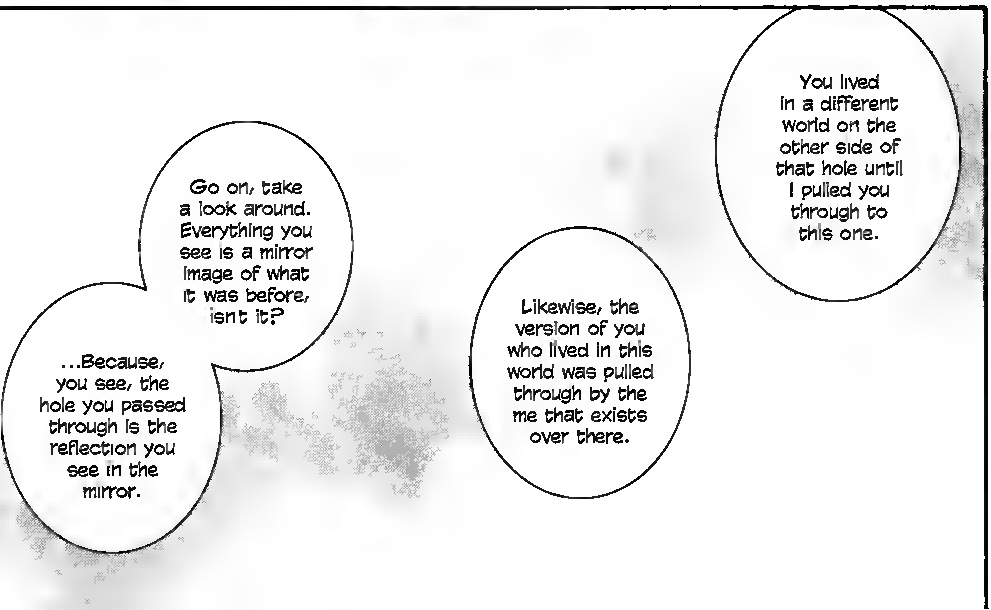
.....
Rai?
.....
Your... face.

Of course... Your mole...
Why didn't I notice it before?
It's the same as mine.
The same as my reflection in the mirror!
Mom...?
Mom!

...I hate to interrupt the tearful reunion,
but we might want to move this to the beach. It's a little dangerous here.

What...? Oh, of....
Wait!
My other son! What about him? Where is he?!
He's fine. He's with his real mother now, too.
Look down. You see?

What you're seeing isn't your reflection in a mirror. It's not the surface of the lake, nor is it ice.
It's the version of you that lives in the world on the other side.
Right now, we're standing on the hole joining them together.
...The entire surface of the lake is an open hole to that same world.
They're right at your feet.


You lived in a different world on the other side of that hole until I pulled you through to this one.
Likewise, the version of you who lived in this world was pulled through by the me that exists over there.
Go on, take a look around. Everything you see is a mirror image of what it was before, isn't it?
...Because, you see, the hole you passed through is the reflection you see in the mirror.

...That's the way it should work, normally. Except for the one portion that was warped.
This hole just happened to be the safest one of many.
You see this? It's constructed so that I can't go any further because the me on the other side is blocking my way.
I only straightened the distortion before.
But I'll be repairing the hole in just a minute. Really you might want to get on dry land.
They might be confused at first, but they get used to the differences in time.
Just one wrong step and you'd slip through the distortion to the other side, no matter how small the hole.
The problem in your case was that you and your son are extremely sensitive to one another.
That's what happened with the children who were spirited off, I'd say. They were only switched out with their other selves.
so I decided ahead of time that it would be best if the both of you were on the same side together.
Like I said, I wanted to see how far you would go.
What you could give up, and who you would choose.
...You knew? The whole time?
It all went pretty much the way I expected, of course.
You could have said something, at least...
Fortunately for them, the only difference is that everything here is mirrored to them. Everything else is exactly the same, so the children would be quick to acclimate themselves to the change.

But with that kind of strength, I don't think you'll have any trouble getting on in this world.
...Be good to each other, now.
I hope Miss Mei and her son will be alright...
Hm?
'Course they'll be alright. Once they get used to getting lost all the time and their alphabet being flipped, anyway. Everything else is pretty much the same.
...Actually, Kukuru.
Yes?
Weren't you scared?
Why did you smile at me back there? You didn't stop me when you knew I was about to get up to no good either.

Mister Rem...
I know you like being mean to people.
...Won't deny it.
But...
I know you like it even more when you see the people you bully...
...push you back!
smile
So even if you're a little mean sometimes, I know you're a good person down inside.
...That doesn't even make sense.
...
I'm a jerk to people because I like being a jerk!
You apparently have a thing or two left to learn about me.
Huh?
Erm... But...
Y-You really are a good person underneath all that meanness though, aren't you? Mister Rem!?
M-Mister Rem!?
.....

-...i!
Rai!
Rai!
What, Mom?
Let's take a break!
I'll make some tea. We'll have dango to go with it.
K'aaay.
The kind with red bean and soybean flour, and-
Huh?
To the right
It'll take me another lifetime to get used to that...
...Rai? What's the matter?
...Ha, ha!

Well, well.
Look at that.
I think they're just as happy as we are.

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(The Tailor Series: The Pale Forest)

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